COACH AND BUS WEEK

CBW

ISSUE 652 November 4 2004 £1.50

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Managing the risk
Pages 10-11

Fuel's gold

Operators reeling over rising prices

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◀Simon Dunn to head Centra coaching: ps 4-5

Time is running out for coach drivers - p 8▶

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CBW says

Mark Williams, Editor, *CBW*, Emap Active, Bretton Court, Bretton, Peterborough PE3 8DZ
or e-mail *mark.williams@emap.com*

Inquiries in the public eye?

WHEN is a public inquiry NOT a public inquiry? When the public never get to hear of it.

At *CBW*, we pride ourselves in providing peerless legal coverage. While the operator 'in the dock' may not appreciate 15 minutes of fame on the Licensing & Legal pages, we believe that bringing detailed reports of proceedings gives our readers a valuable insight into the current 'temperature' of enforcement.

Once you've heard how others have fared, you can get a measure of what condition your own business has to be in to escape the attentions of VOSA. I know for a fact that many of the 'test case' public inquiries published in full in *CBW* have steered the policy of operators.

How do we get these full reports? In short, we begin with selecting what we believe are the most interesting inquiries from Notices & Proceedings. We then pay professional press agencies to attend those inquiries on our behalf.

This has worked very well until recently. Then came problems. On one occasion, notice of an important inquiry, which had already been postponed once, was issued on the day of the inquiry, making it impossible for us to organise attendance. And one after another, inquiries have been cancelled without prior notice.

This week, our reporter turned up to be told that an inquiry had been postponed an hour, so he waited - but then he was told it would be postponed until a "future date."

I have yet to be told why this has been happening with such regularity but I spoke to one operator whose inquiry was postponed and heard a worrying story.

He answered the phone one morning to a solicitor, who asked if he needed representation at his forthcoming public inquiry. "What public inquiry?" he asked. It took a call to the Traffic Area Office to solicit a fax confirming he had, indeed, been called up. With only days to prepare he sought and got a postponement.

'I have yet to be told why this has happened so regularly'

If those operators being called to inquiry don't find out when they're taking place, what hope has *CBW*? Take a look at N&P North Eastern Area (it's online at *www.vosa.gov.uk*), dated Friday, October 29; it lists an inquiry on Monday, November 1. What likelihood is there of the 'public' - usually the press - attending the inquiry?

These problems have serious implications that go way beyond the huge cost to this magazine of wasting our reporters' time; they mean that some operators' misdeeds are never made public, neither in CBW for the benefit of other operators, nor for the public in local newspapers.

● Tony McNulty has, to his credit, once again dropped me a line about one of our stories - needless to say, on the Disability Discrimination Act as it applies to new school coaches.

Mr McNulty says home-to-school services are, categorically, not in scope if they don't charge 'separate fares' - and that may include 'periodic' charges for transport. I look forward to further communication explaining why, if school services are the equivalent of a standard hire, the DfT advice to operators has been to register them with the Traffic Area Office...

Mark Williams, Editor

Coach and Bus Week is a member of the following organisations:

COACH TOURISM COUNCIL cpt

ABC

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COACH AND BUS WEEK CBW

For all *CBW* contact names and phone numbers please turn to page 23

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Simon Dunn: top Centra

MARK WILLIAMS EDITOR

Dunn-Line founder's son to take post in Brum-based operation

SIMON Dunn has emerged as the new head of coaching for much of Centra, including the Flights operation formerly owned by the Dunn-Line business.

Mr Dunn - the former MD at Flights - told *CBW* this week that his new role following the sale (*CBW*, October 21) sees him take on commercial responsibility for coaching at Centra, Hallmark and Flights, with a minor role in the Centra-owned Mitcham Belle operation in London.

"It's early days and my role is not yet crystal clear," he said. "I can say that it will give me involvement in commercial and engineering aspects of the business."

Mr Dunn will have former Dunn-Line manager Anthony Goozee working alongside him, while former Hallmark MD Brian Foster will continue his role in coaching development. At present, it looks as if the Coleshill Hallmark depot will close, transferring the vehicles and some of the staff to Flights' facility at Long Acre.

"We are in the process of offering drivers the opportunity to transfer to Long Acre. We don't want to lose any of the Hallmark staff, but there could be a redundancy situation," he said.

Mr Dunn is the son of Bob Dunn, chairman and MD of the Dunn-Line group based in Nottingham. He was appointed to his role in Flights shortly after Dunn-Line took it over.

"The Flights and Hallmark brands will remain - we believe they have a high value," Mr Dunn told *CBW*.

Hallmark hit financial problems last year and was taken over in a management buyout. It then hit licensing problems relating to the business transfer and its directors decided to sell the business to acquisitive Centra - part of the massive Central Parking System group based near Heathrow.

Hallmark's most high-profile asset is contracts with premiership football clubs, including the provision of the Arsenal team coach.

Major extension on successful QBC

Buses to Bray now beat the traffic queues

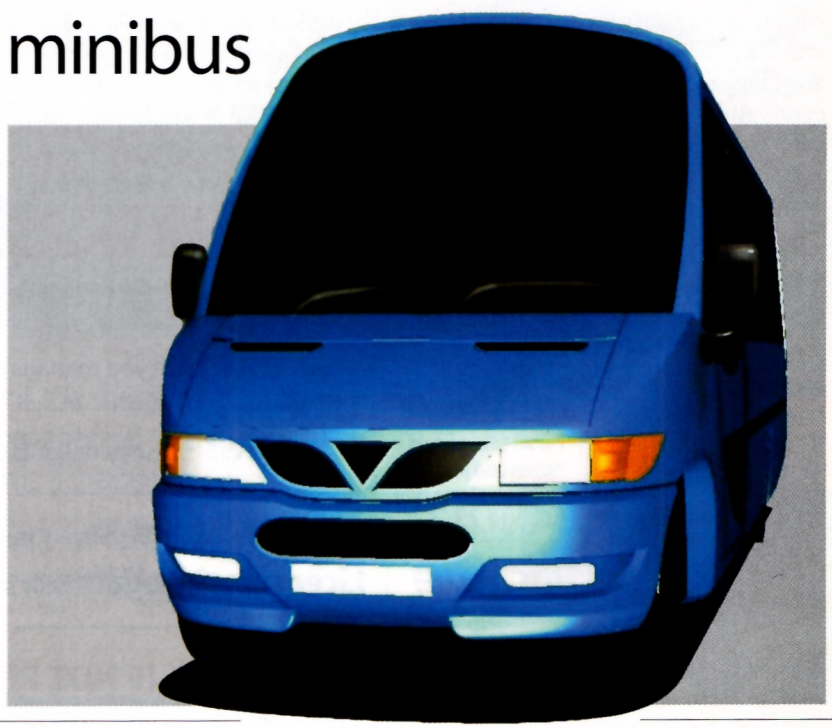
A MAJOR increase in bus services to the rapidly-growing commuter town of Bray in Ireland will coincide with the opening of the four-mile long Bray QBC (Quality Bus Corridor).

The new freeway effectively extends the existing and highly successful Stillorgan QBC to within two miles of Bray, Co Wicklow, providing virtually uninterrupted bus priority for almost ten miles, right into Dublin city centre.

The Stillorgan QBC was already the most successful in Dublin, with passenger numbers growing by nearly 200% following its introduction five years ago. The extension to Bray uses the hard shoulder of the N11 dual-carriageway and was constructed in tandem with a number of road and junction improvements.

Operators using the new corridor include Dublin Bus, which, in addition to existing services, has introduced a new Bray-to-Dublin route direct via the QBC, Bus Eireann, and the independent operators Finnegans of Bray and St Kevins of Roundwood.

Wright's launches minibus



WRIGHTBUS launched its entry to the minibus market at Coach&Bus 2004 this week with a new collaboration with Irisbus.

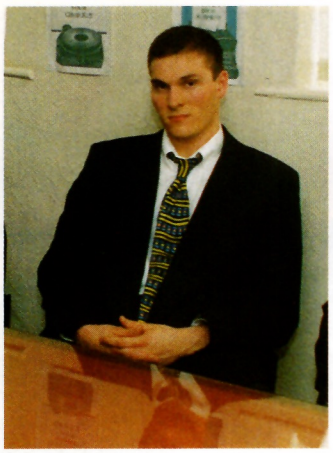
The Satellite Will be an accessible 24- or 28-seat vehicle based on the Irisbus LoGo chassis, using Iveco's recently-launched 3-litre HPT engine. The vehicle will feature an Allison World Series automatic gearbox, Telma retarder and disc brakes all round.

"It is widely accepted that a lot of operators of step-entrance, van-derived minibuses are having trouble finding a cost-effective replacement," said Sam McLaren, Wrightbus' commercial director. "The future of many marginal services could be jeopardised if those operators had to buy heavier-duty 10- or 10.5-tonne models to meet the needs of the Disability Discrimination Act."

Irisbus' new drop-centre frame is specially designed for the market, leaving Wrights to coach-build a body. A prototype is expected to be complete by mid-2005.

● All the news from Coach&Bus 2004 will be in next week's *CBW*

role



Simon Dunn: new role

Diamond into the Futura

DIAMOND HOLIDAYS of Morriston, Swansea, has completed the intake of a batch of 12 Bova Futuras representing an investment of £2.4m.

The new coaches - all 12m FHD Futuras - represent the first significant expenditure since the company underwent a management buyout in January this year - led by managing director Chris Roberts. Acquired from Moseley in the South, the vehicles were delivered in two batches - six at the end of June and six more at the end of September.

Destined for use on the company's advertised UK and continental tour programme, they were supplied with the same full-executive specification including 49 reclining seats, air conditioning, rear toilet/washroom, DVD systems with twin monitors and drinks facilities.

Transport manager Ryan Jones told *CBW*: "Our new Bovas have replaced Beulas-bodied Iveco EuroRiders. We think they are far more suited to our particular operation. They have been particularly good on the long-haul continental tours."

Mr Jones added that Diamond Holidays has seen a strong upturn in its continental bookings over 2003 and thinks this is a strong market with plenty of scope for development. The company's UK touring operations, he said, had maintained a similar level of busi-

LTCOA: flying visit to Ferrari

LONDON Tourist Coach Operators Association enjoyed a four-day visit to Modena in Italy - home of Ferrari.

The excursion was sponsored by Moseley PCV/Moseley In The South and Sitcar, manufacturers of the Beluga range of midi coaches. Staying three nights in Bologna, the LTCOA went sightseeing, had a visit to the Sitcar factory, and then went to the nearby Ferrari facility (pictured).

"The hospitality and generosity of all at Sitcar and the Moseley Group was much appreciated by our members," said LTCOA chairman, Mark Anderson. "I am hopeful that a number of orders for Beluga will follow but the Ferraris did seem a little outside of the membership's price range."

Minister of State on offensive over DDA

MINISTER of State for Transport, Tony McNulty, says there is no 'conundrum' over DAA rules relating to school buses and coaches.

Referring to *CBW*'s article 'DDA school bus conundrum' (Questions & Answers October 14), Mr McNulty says vital words in advice issued in 2002 were missed from the advice quoted in the article, which suggested that the definition of 'separate fares' may not be clear.

CBW's legal expert said the 2002 advice was that, even where no separate fare is charged, school contract operations are in scope of the new DDA regulation for 'scheduled' services as laid out in the current draft. However, Mr McNulty says this would be true only where fares are "charged on a periodic basis."

"There is no confusion on the legal requirements for new school coaches over 22 passengers from January 1, 2005," the letter explains. "If any of the children are charged a fare to travel on the coach whether such a fare is charged on the vehicle itself, or in advance on a periodic basis, then the coach has to comply with the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations SI 2000 No. 1970, as amended.

"That means the coach will be required to comply with the general accessibility provisions and to provide access for a wheelchair user."

CBW's legal expert thanked Mr McNulty for his comments but said the issue arises because for some time operators have been advised by the Department and by traffic commissioners that school services should be registered because, although contracted, they are deemed to be run at separate fares.

"What I'd like to see is for the Department to declare exactly what a school service is - is it a contracted service like any other hire, in which case it does not have to be registered. I also know that in discussions with the Department, it understands the problem and agrees it should be battened down."

● Tony McNulty's letter appears in full on page 23.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tees Valley review

JMP Consulting is looking at the opportunities for joint working on strategic and operational public transport services across five Tees Valley local authorities.

First for youngsters

First in the Potteries launched a new unlimited travel ticket for children aged up to 15. Available in weekly, monthly or annual versions, it lets children travel any time of the day on any day.

Edwards joins Mentor

JEFF EDWARDS has joined Mentor Coach & Bus as regional sales manager. Jeff will be responsible for promoting sales in the South East of the UK. He has worked in the coach industry for a number of years and brings with him a wealth of experience - including similar former positions with TransBus, Dennis and Volvo Coach Sales.

Priority pack

The second edition of the Bus Priority Resource Pack is to be launched at the first annual Bus Priority Conference in December. The pack illustrates good practice examples of bus priority and gives advice and guidance on the implementation and monitoring of such schemes. An interactive version of the pack can be viewed at *www.buspriority.org*

Ireland on show

Ireland's premier PSV show, Coach and Bus 2004, is being held at The RDS Simmonscourt Pavilion, Dublin, on November 20-21. CBW will be including a show preview next week and will be at the show to bring you all the latest news. For details contact Cora Collins, chief executive, Coach Tourism & Transport Council of Ireland, Drumconrath Road, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, Ireland, tel 00353 (0)42 9663462, e-mail c.collins.cttc@iol.ie - website www.cttc.ie

Cancer benefit

Arriva London marked the last day of Routemaster operation on TfL Route 73 by giving passengers and enthusiasts the opportunity to travel on 17 historic vehicles. No fares were charged aboard the guest vehicles but passengers were asked to donate to the Cancer Research UK charity and £250 was raised.

Diesel prices prove fuel's

Operators plan surcharges to counter price rises

ANDY RODEN REPORTER **AND MARK WILLIAMS** EDITOR

FUEL price rises of almost 20% over the past 12 months could see operators facing severe difficulties.

The findings are revealed in a *CBW* investigation, which shows that operators of medium-to-large firms could be facing additional costs of tens of thousands of pounds - and, if they operate on contract work, previously profitable contracts could now be making a loss due to the hikes.

So bad is the situation becoming that some operators are looking at imposing a surcharge on work to cover the ever-rising cost of fuel. Among them is Kent-based The King's Ferry - a big operator, but even so, it's not immune. Says managing director Steve O'Neill: "It marks a direct cost of £200,000 per year. The problem is you can't ignore that kind of increase. At the moment, diesel's 'liquid gold'. The market really must approach this issue and work together - at least if it's making some inroads, it'll survive."

His finance director, Stephen Hills reckons that fuel is costing £4,000 more per week than a year ago - and it's all revenue that comes off the bottom line.

Ian Shipley of Classic Coaches, in Stanley, County Durham, is looking at taking similar measures to The King's Ferry, but is concerned more operators aren't following suit: "It's as if we're fighting this cause on our own - many operators are unaware of the rising fuel costs on their businesses. We're looking at a £10 surcharge and, if we weren't to pass that on, we'd lose our profit margin over the year - it's as simple as that."

Mr Shipley isn't just looking at imposing a one-off charge, however: "Ideally, we'd like a pricing mechanism that rises and falls in relation to fuel prices, say from March this year. That would mean our margins would be protected when they rise, and customers when they fall."

And in terms of extra cost imposed, Mr Shipley offers a chilling warning: "If we'd bought all the fuel for 2004 at 2003's prices, we'd have saved £300,000. That's almost a whole year's profits."

Ian Luckett, MD of Lucketts Travel of Fareham, told *CBW*: "The figures always look big if you add them up for the year but, for example, if I were trying to account for a penny a litre increase for a 200-mile trip, I'd be asking the hirer for an extra 90p. Clearly that's not something I would do.

"The way we keep on top of the problem is to input fuel prices into our hire costing matrix on a daily basis.

"Where the margin is particularly tight for a contract tender, we might add a caveat that we would absorb, say, a 5% increase each year but would consider a surcharge above this limit."

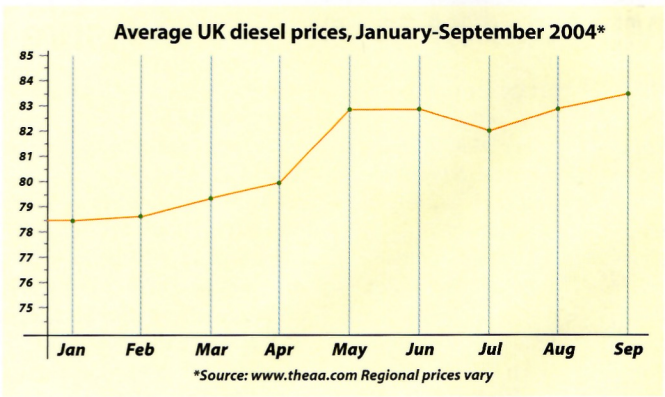
Mr Luckett said his experience of this practice is that, although some contractors raise an eyebrow, most accept it in the same way they expect fuel surcharges for air travel. He added that operations such as express services, which demand very high vehicle utilisation, would be more seriously affected.

The Confederation for Passenger Transport's guidance is:

- For private hires: If the operator is a CPT member and uses the model terms and conditions of hire, it gives him an opportunity to impose a surcharge as long as it is at least 30 days out from the date of hire. The increase in fuel costs has taken place over a reasonably long period and should have allowed this possibility
- Holidays: any operator in the Bonded Coach Holiday scheme also has the opportunity within the trading charter to surcharge specifically for fuel price increases
- Contracts: unless the operator has been skillful in his initial negotiations, there will not be the same opportunity to sur-

'The way we keep on top of the problem is to input fuel prices into our hire costing matrix on a daily basis'
Ian Luckett, MD of Lucketts Travel, Fareham

King's Ferry: diesel's 'liquid gold'



London Service Permit seminar planned

LONDON BUSES is planning a one-day seminar, on Friday November 26 to discuss its review of the criteria used in granting London Service Permit applications.

The organisers say they will look at the existing London Service Permit system and outline future proposals. They welcome discussion on the plans and any feedback, which will be considered in the review of the mayor's guidance document scheduled for publication at the end of March 2005.

Topics covered within the seminar include:

- Experience with existing arrangements
- Environmental issues
- Health & Safety

There will also be an update on the Express Coach Forum.

The seminar will be held at the Crowne Plaza London City Hotel,

gold

charge. However, this is the reason for the publication of the cost index which will give them some ammunition when renegotiating rates the next time round or, indeed, a mid-term renegotiation.

There is also some technical advice CPT can give that might help an operator if they are not already doing these things:

- Monitor fuel usage to ensure there is no 'stock loss'
- Closely monitor fuel consumption to see if any vehicle is using more than expected that might point to a defect
- Cut speeds - reducing to a 'company' limit from the speed limited setting can help save fuel
- Ensure best practice in preventative maintenance - well-maintained vehicles can often be more fuel efficient
- If bunkering fuel, make sure you are getting the best deal and ensure it is fully secure. Some CPT members we are aware of forward buy their fuel to beat the worst increases.

19 New Bridge Street,
London EC4V 6DB.
For more information contact Barry Skinner, licensing manager, Transport for London, London Buses, 172, Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9TN, tel 0207 918 3135.

Buzzlines builds its team

ELEVEN TEAMS of enthusiastic Buzzlines drivers parked up their coaches to take part in a two-hour endurance karting marathon at the Lydd racing circuit, near Folkestone, Kent.

Buzzlines has introduced the event as a team-building day that culminates in a grand dinner dance at the Ashford International Hotel. It brought together drivers and support staff from the company's offices at Lympne, Broadstairs, Sandwich and Walton Oaks.

General manager Paul Frankland said: "It was a chance for them to get together and have some fun as well as staff from the dispersed sites to get to know each other. It was great fun and the feedback has been enthusiastic - so I'm sure we will be holding similar events in the future."

Buzzlines' event was organised by Paul Flisher and Bob Brown - who also succeeded in raising over £500 for the Kent Air Ambulance Trust - the Buzzlines charity.

Brighton partnership wins award

BRIGHTON & Hove City Council has won an award for excellence and professional achievement from the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport for its partnership with Brighton & Hove Buses.

Among successes have been real-time passenger information and infrastructure improvements for lowfloor buses. Brighton & Hove has seen a 5% rise in bus use, against a national target of 1%, and more customers than ever are said to be satisfied with the service.

Why Ray called it a Day

AFTER 28 years of successful operation, Day's Coaches of Rotherham is winding up its coaching business.

And one of the reasons given by the Day family for quitting the industry is the attitude of the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA). In a four-page feature in this week's *CBW* we tell the Days' story.

Although Day's has enjoyed operating coaches despite the huge amount of organisation and background work that accompanies private hires, schools work and touring, changes in the way the industry is regulated have begun to leave a bad taste, say the Days.

Ray Day said: "We had a very good relationship with the 'Ministry' and have always done our utmost to ensure vehicles are roadworthy and all our systems are in place.

"At the peak of our operations we went six years with no faults registered at annual inspections and we've never been frightened of turning up at events where we know there will be spot checks but, over the past couple of years, things have degenerated considerably.

"It seems they are only interested in achieving numbers and are deliberately looking for things to fail a vehicle on. I don't believe any operator can now live up to the letter of the law 100% of the time...

"They can lose all your paperwork and not be accountable for it but, if we lose one tachograph disc, we are explaining our lives away for weeks...

"They've become pedantic and overbearing in the extreme and they just create bad feeling where there should be a spirit of working together. If they concentrated their efforts on bringing those to justice who do operate illegally or below required standards we'd all have a greater respect for them."

● ***Read more on pages 24-27.***

EVENTS

November 6-10: CUTA Fall Conference and Trans_expo, Montreal, Canada. www.cutaac-tu.ca

November 8-11: World Travel Market, ExCeL, London www.worldtravelmart.co.uk

November 9-12: CTA Show, G-Mex. 0870 774 3586

November 10: Managing Fleet Safety Seminar, Birmingham. 0800 977 4088

November 13: John Hughes Lecture; Crossley Motors, Gardens Hotel, Manchester. 0161 432 8241, email osnwyorks@ntlworld.com

November 16: Quality Bus Contracts: The Legal & Financial Implications, CBI Conference Centre, London. 01224 263 164

November 16-17: TRICS Transport and Development Conference, Regents Park Marriott Hotel, London. 020 7391 7013

November 18: Bus Industry Awards presentations, London Hilton Hotel, Park Lane. 0870 900 1450

Nov 20-21: Coach and Bus 2004, RDS Simmonscourt Pavilion, Dublin, 00353 (0) 42 9663462, www.cttc.ie

November 24: Managing Fleet Safety Seminar, Manchester. 0800 977 4088

November 25-26: Moving On; Public Transport, joining it up, Liverpool Town Hall. 0191 241 4523

November 26: Centennial of Midland Red, Black Country Transport Museum, Dudley, West Midlands. Normal admission to venue

November 30: Sustainable Development of the North West of England, Renaissance Manchester Hotel. 0207 787 1210

December 9: Impact of Disability Discrimination Legislation, Victoria Park Plaza Hotel, London. 0207 787 1210

2005

January 8: Excursions 2005, Alexandra Palace, north London. 023 8062 5500

March 1: Managing Fleet Safety Seminar, Glasgow. 0800 977 4088

March 22: Managing Fleet Safety Seminar, Belfast. 0800 977 4088

April 5-9: Solutrans 2005, Eurexpo Exhibition Center, Lyon

April 25-26: Confederation of Passenger Transport UK 30th Scottish Annual Conference, Gleneagles Hotel, Auchterader. 0131 272 2150

New hours rules spark more driver worries

FRANK FORSTER DEPUTY EDITOR

Operators concerned and uncertain over latest EU legislation

THE LATEST update of the European Union's working time legislation, due to take effect from March 23 next year, is causing concern and some confusion among coach and bus operators.

The concern comes from the fact that coach drivers' hours will be severely limited - over a period - which is likely to have a major impact on coach operators and lead to further driver shortages.

The confusion has partly been caused by articles in other trade magazines that relate to how the directive affects freight transport as opposed to PSVs. However, the new regulations will substantially affect the number of hours PSV drivers can work if they come under the current EU Drivers' Hours regulations (ie, mainly coach drivers). Furthermore, even more regulations mooted for the future could substantially affect the bus industry by limiting the amount of hours bus drivers work by reducing 'opt-out' opportunities.

Drivers currently operating under the EU Drivers' Hours rules (Regulation EC 3820/85) are not regulated by the 48-hour average working week rule in the Working Time Directive and thus can currently work an average week of more than 48 hours. From next March, these drivers will still be controlled by the EU Drivers' Hours regulations but will also be restricted to the 48-hour average working week as stipulated by the Working Time Directive and the associated rest and break provisions.

The sort of question we are being asked is: "We run coaches and HGVs and, when reading a freight trade magazine recently, I noticed something which indicated that the 'opt-out' from the 48-hour week would be withdrawn next year. I understand that the 'opt-out' doesn't yet apply to coach drivers but what about the future for bus drivers?'"

CBW's legal expert says: "Bus drivers operating on routes which exceed 50km in single journey length are already governed by the EU Drivers' Hours rules and, thereby, will come within scope of the Road Transport Directive legislation when introduced next March.

More driver shortages?

"Bus drivers on routes not exceeding 50km in single route length will be exempt from the new legislation. Therefore, they will be able to continue to exercise their freedom to 'opt-out' of their right to work no more than the 48-hour average working week introduced by the base directive on Working Time - just as they can now.

"However, it is possible that readers may have read something relating to a recently published EU proposal which would further amend the Working Time Directive, which has applied to some greater or lesser degree to all UK road transport industry employees since August 2003, resulting in a change to the 'opt-out' for bus drivers.

"The 'opt-out' would still be available but would be subject to tighter rules and stricter control procedures - including fines as penalties on employers who failed to comply with the new rules. The proposals have been adopted by the European Commission dealing with 'social' issues and are scheduled to come before the European Parliament in due course. As yet, we are not aware of any likely date for implementation in UK."

Consultation on working time starts

THE Government is asking the industry to comment on the draft Road Transport Regulations, published this week.

The proposed regulations will enforce a 48-hour week in the industry, with a maximum 60 hours allowable in any single week, and a maximum ten-hour night shift. Though the 48-hour week is non-negotiable, in a nod to seasonal employment, the reference period for the calculation can be extended to as long as six months with the collective agreement of the workforce.

New rules apply to anyone who works with a tacho, and their crews

Night shifts can be extended on the same basis.

The default period - where none is specified in a written agreement with the workforce - is 17 weeks. In the annual calculation, allowance must be made for four weeks' annual leave.

The new rules apply to anyone who works with a tachograph, and their crews. Non-mobile workers fall within scope of the Working Time Regulations, and some completely independent self-employed drivers will not have to comply until 2009.

The Department for Transport guidance points out that all duties - including loading, cleaning and any period during which the worker is not able to 'freely dispose of his/her time' - fall into scope.

The guidance says that Periods of Availability - eg, for mobile workers on standby and second crew members - may not count against working time under certain circumstances.

Other exemptions include coach driving on international journeys, when EU Drivers' Hours rules take precedence over the Road Transport Regulations, allowing more than 60 hours' driving in one week, although not allowing the 48-hour week rules to be waived over the agreed reference period.

The guidance notes provide examples of calculations employers can make to apply the new regulation, which comes into force on March 23, 2005. The notes can be found at *www.dft.gov.uk*.

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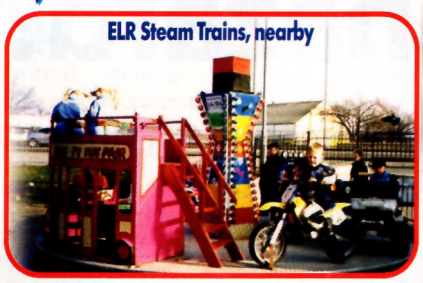

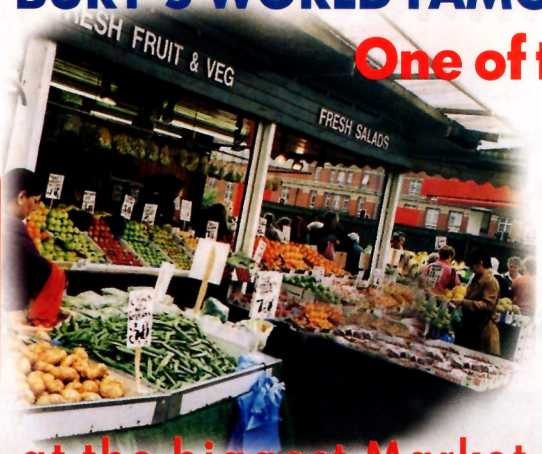

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Report of the Parliamentary Transport Select Committee on the Bus Industry – Published September 2002

TfL – London Buses

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More information: www.tfl.gov.uk/beacon
– beacon@tfl-buses.co.uk
– Bridget Taylor – Beacon Coordinator
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MAYOR OF LONDON

Beacon Authority 2004-2005 Better Local Public Transport

Transport for London BUSES

Insurance

An occupational hazard?

If operators have robust risk management strategies and training programmes in place their incident levels will fall, says Tim Brangwyn of CPT Insurance & Risk Solutions

DRIVER-RELATED accidents within the passenger transport sector are accepted by many operators and their staff as the norm - they're an occupational hazard.

But should they be? What measures do operators have in place to reduce the number of incidents among their drivers and will they really make a difference to their insurance premiums?

According to CPT Insurance & Risk Solutions (CPTIRS), the most common categories of accidents among operators are:

- Hitting a parked third-party vehicle
- Passenger injury
- Changing lanes
- Hitting immobile property
- Running into the rear/reversing into third-party vehicles

Tim Brangwyn of CPTIRS says: "If operators have robust risk management strategies and training programmes in place their incident levels will fall. When we ask clients 'what are the main causes of driver-related accidents' their responses reveal, in many cases, a lack of driver training."

Operators were asked the same accident causation question during last year's Bus & Coach Risk Management Survey and their replies included:

- "A lack of training and concentration, the length of shifts and the overall stress of the job."
- "Drivers don't concentrate as they could, they don't respect the vehicles they're driving, they need to be more careful."
- "Some drivers have the wrong attitude - they're too aggressive. Also speed and harsh braking."
- "A lack of anticipation of actions of other road users and the driver's own lack of concentration or carelessness."

Operators attributed passenger injuries to:

- "Poor driving - like accelerating and braking when passengers are still standing up."
- "Drivers moving off before passengers

Photo: Eric Hayman

sitting down."

- "Slips and falls."

While driver incidents can have a big impact on operational costs and insurance premiums, operators need to look further than simply implementing training programmes. Training cannot work in isolation - it should be monitored, measured and introduced as part of a general framework of customer care, plus form part of an overall strategy which encompasses recruitment and management of accidents.

Operators must recognise the importance of accident prevention and adopt a proactive management of claims when they occur. Are risk management efforts directed to those on the 'front line', for example, scene of accident training and effective accident report writing?

If drivers understand the importance of effective claims reporting, including gathering photographic evidence and witness details, it will undoubtedly strengthen the defence of non-fault claims, speed up claims settlements and avoid legal fees building up where they are at fault.

How many operators put health & safety at the top of their agenda? Are staff given the same level of attention as passengers? What percentage of the budget is spent on health & safety? How many staff are trained in this area?

As operators look to eastern European drivers to fill their vacancies, consideration must be given as to whether they will help reduce the number of claims, or increase them. What checks are in place to assess driving experience? How many operators actively integrate eastern European drivers into their new working surroundings through customer service and training programmes? Bearing in mind that those on the front-line are the company ambassadors, how are the language barriers overcome?

It is widely accepted that insurance and claims costs are impacting on operational costs, so incentives, via recognition and reward programmes, should be given to drivers to reduce that financial burden.

Tim continues: "We all know how tough it is - Employers Liability and third party personal injury claims are continuing to grow in frequency and costs, plus insurance premiums are contributing to rising operational costs. However, those with risk management strategies in place can tackle these issues - they will help to reduce the numbers of incidents and evidence to insurers they are proactively working to control their exposure to risk. At the very least, premiums should remain static or go down."

By adopting the following mindset, operators can help control the level of incidents and stabilise or reduce their premiums:

a) Claims Prevention and Mitigation - includes driver training, health & safety risk assessment, vehicle maintenance, accident reporting and documentation, drug & alcohol awareness and testing, etc

b) Operational Management - analyse claims, assess areas of continuous improvement and implement changes

c) Claims Management - change the excess and appoint transport solicitors to avoid legal fees building up. They'll settle genuine claims quickly and deal with 'opportunist' ones appropriately.

Last year's Bus & Coach Survey revealed that 80% of accidents now result in claims and only a small minority expect to see their claims go down. Regional operators are faced with a difficult market and this factor certainly contributes to the gloomy predictions from 27% who expect profits to fall by 2006.

In light of the UK's current attitude to litigation and Datamonitor's 2002 prediction that the cost of personal injury claims are increasing by 12-17% per annum, premiums will continue to escalate - resulting in a greater number of operators unable to sustain this hike in claims and premiums.

No business should accept driver-related accidents and rising premiums as an occupational hazard. CPTIRS not only works with operators to provide claims support and ongoing accident management and review, but their experts design and implement risk management strategies and re-negotiate premiums.

- ***Further information from: Tim Brangwyn on 01732744700, or www.cptirs.com***

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Deals from Disney

WILLIAM GOLDEN CORRESPONDENT

Attraction launches dedicated group tickets brochure

OPERATORS who adhere to the old Fred Pontin maxim from those television ads and "book early" will qualify for money-saving deals on visits to Disneyland Resort Paris next year.

The French attraction has just launched its dedicated group tickets brochure for the period April to November 2005 and is offering from 3 off each 29 one-day, one-park adult ticket. The offer applies to bookings for groups of 12 or more made more than seven days before arrival.

Book more than 15 days before arrival and, as well as the ticket discount, groups qualify for a free coach-parking voucher. In addition, there is free ticket delivery within the UK for all advance bookings made more than seven days before arrival.

Groups of 12 or more will also qualify for a discount of up to 6 on each 29 one -day, one-park adult dated ticket for the special Magical Weeks in 2005. These will be held from April 11 to 17, May 21 to 27, June 13 to 19, September 12 to 18 and October 3 to 9.

The new brochure includes details of the launch of Space Mountain: Mission II, which opens on April 9 2005, and Wishes, the new show using fireworks choreographed to classic Disney music which will run from July 16 to August 28 2005. There also are details about booking dedicated group sessions at the Manchester United Soccer School.

Disneyland Paris: Book more than 15 days ahead for ticket discount and free coach-parking for groups

For bookings and more information contact the dedicated group reservation department on 00 33 1 60 30 20 70 or e-mail *dlp.cro.uk.groups@disney.com*

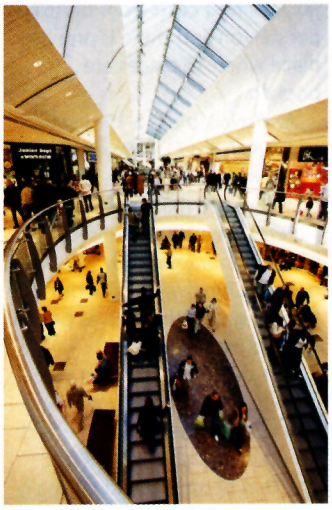
● Meanwhile, to celebrate Disney's Christmas season, Disneyland Resort Paris and Eurostar have organised a special one-night, two-day travel agent fam trip departing November 29 2004.

During the trip all meals, overnight accommodation and theme park tickets will be provided by Disneyland Resort Paris as well as return travel from Ashford International or London Waterloo to the resort courtesy of Eurostar.

Fam trip places are limited and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis so agents should call 020 8222 2855 or 020 8222 1264 as soon as possible to request their booking form. All booking forms must be received by November 15 2004.

● ***For further information contact the Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Press Office on 020 8222 2829 or Annie Hoult, Spark PR on 07976 719808 or*** **annie.hoult@sparkpr.co.uk**

New service at Lakeside Shopping Centre



Sales pitch: Lakeside is a favourite with coach groups

AS THE run-up to Christmas gathers momentum and shopping excursions appear on itineraries, coach drivers should be pleased with a new service at the Lakeside Shopping Centre in Essex.

The coach park has been moved to Car Park 8, which means that passengers now step off the vehicle and walk straight to the Debenhams store. Drivers should follow the AA signs and they will be guided into a free parking space.

As part of the new service, drivers with proof of status will now be able to claim a £5 gift voucher from the customer services desk outside Boots on Level 1.

Laurie Adams, marketing executive at Lakeside, said: "We offer drivers and their passengers an entertaining and fulfiling experience when they visit Lakeside, which has resulted in coach parties and groups returning year after year. Lakeside prides itself on repaying shoppers and drivers with great rewards and first-class customer service."

Lakeside is open daily and has 300 shops, four department stores, cafés and restaurants.

For more information go to *www.lakeside.uk.com*

● Free coach parking is being offered in Leeds this Christmas in a bid to encourage more groups to visit the city. The coach park on Woodhouse Moor can accommodate up to 100 vehicles and is near Leeds University on the A660 and signposted from Kirkgate Market and the bus station. The site is open from 0930hrs to 1730hrs from Sunday November 7 until Friday December 24.

There are signed coach drop-off points in the centre of the city all year and drivers may obtain a map of these from the tourism unit of Leeds City Council on 0113 247 4817.

Groups who take advantage of the free parking will be able to visit Christkinedelmarkt, a traditional German Christmas Market, held in Millennium Square from November 25 to December 21.

Special garden-themed tours included by trust

NINE special garden-themed tours are included in an extension of the National Trust for Scotland's itinerary service, which was successfully introduced last spring.

The new itineraries are divided into two groups - area garden tours and themed garden tours - and the former covers the north east, central Scotland, the east and west coasts and the south. The themed tours feature Working Walled Gardens, Cut Flower Gardens, Period Gardens and Woodland Gardens and included guided walks led by head gardeners or specialists.

Geraldine Graf, head of travel trade at the National Trust for Scotland, said: "The growing interest in garden tours from our travel trade partners has motivated us to develop an exciting selection of garden itineraries in Scotland. Some of the most stunning, versatile and unique gardens are found in Scotland and The National Trust for Scotland looks after over 30 of them."

The itinerary booking service introduced in the spring is a one-stop shop that makes its easier for operators to book and modify tours to Scotland that include more than 120 gardens, castles, historic sites, houses and monuments in the National Trust for Scotland portfolio.

● ***For more information contact Geraldine Graf on 0131 243 9406 or e-mail ggraf@nts.org.uk***

TfL scraps commission-cut plans

TRANSPORT for London (TfL) has withdrawn plans to cut travel trade commission on the Visitor Travel Card scheme by 50 %, following pressure by VisitBritain and the British Incoming Tour Operators Association (BITOA).

The proposed cut in commission was mooted during a review of the Visitor Travel Card scheme, in which the cards are sold overseas through VisitBritain's international call centres and BITOA members. However, following a joint representation, Transport for London agreed to leave the commission at current levels. The organisation has simplified the range of travel cards and introduced a new three-day card.

Stephen Dowd, chief executive of BITOA, said: "Following our discussions, Transport for London acknowledged the advantage of allowing international visitors to buy travel tickets in advance. Our members offer invaluable advice in the consumers' own language as part of a complete travel package, while here in Britain it will help reduce congestion at stations."

● ***Details available at* www.transport-for-london.gov.uk/tfl/agent-information**

Free places being offered by Cosmos Tourama

COSMOS Tourama, the escorted touring specialist, is offering free places when 15 to 35 places are booked on a number of tours in its 2005 programme.

Destinations include Europe, the Canadian Rockies and the United States of America.

For example, a free place is on offer when 15 passengers book a Grand Tour of Sicily next October. Prices start from £599 for this eight-day tour of the Italian island.

A similar free place offer is available on a Romantic Andalucia tour, where prices start from £499 for the eight-day tour to Spain.

The Heart of the Canadian Rockies tour costs from £1,169 per person and there is one free place when 16 places are booked.

Also available is a 15-day tour to China from £1,439 per person, again with one place when 16 bookings are made.

Peter Traynor, sales director of Cosmos Tourama, said: "We believe China will be the destination for groups in 2005 as people get more adventurous.

"We made the decision to include a selection of long-haul tours and China was the perfect group destination, as it is not one that people would normally feel comfortable travelling to independently."

Prague tour a brisk seller

A SIX-DAY New Year tour to Prague has proved a brisk seller for Brian Isaac Coach Holidays.

The operator, based in Morriston, near Swansea, put a small ad in the local press and sold out the coach within days. Tickets for a second coach have now gone on sales for the special trip, which is scheduled to depart on January 2 2005. The trip has been timed to take in the end of the Christmas market in Prague, which is in Wenceslas Square until January 5.

The tour is selling for only £139 per person based on sharing a twin or double room and includes return ferry crossing, bed and breakfast accommodation in a three-star hotel in Prague and a guided walking tour of the city centre. There is an overnight stop in a three-star hotel near Cologne on the outward leg and a stop in a two or three-star hotel on the Rhine on the return.

Stena Line goes hot and spicy

STENA Line is currying favour with groups by getting spicy on all its routes to Ireland.

The operator has teamed up with Authentic Foods to offer a new Stena 'n' Spice range of Indian meals in the Food City restaurant. These range from mild to hot Indian curries and other snacks and a bottle or pint of Stella Artois lager is being given away with every meal ordered. The taste of India will cost from 6.70 to 11.45.

Right: Stena's Jim Wallace samples one of the new dishes

Buzz from Blackpool trip

A TRIP to the Blackpool Illuminations caused a buzz among clients of Buzzlines, the Kent-based tour operator.

A visit to the Lancashire resort was introduced into the 2003 programme and proved so popular that another visit was included this year. The five-day tour departed on October 25 and included a full day visit to the Lake District, shopping in Fleetwood market and a drive through the Derbyshire Dales.

Keith Barraclough, Buzzlines' holiday and excursions organiser, has already included Blackpool as a short-break destination for 2005 and is also planning new trips to North Wales, including Snowdonia, to meet demand from regular passengers.

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Money Matters

Due diligence: why it's so important in acquisition

David Main and Paul Fussell of Hazlewoods continue their series of articles on considerations when buying a business

IN OUR previous article we highlighted the fact that 'due diligence' is a normal part of the process when acquiring a business.

Here, we consider why due diligence is carried out by prospective purchasers.

The due diligence process can be perceived as expensive, time consuming and pedantic. So, is it a valuable part of the acquisition process or a necessary evil? Not many would argue with the fact that due diligence is necessary because a confirmation of the accuracy of the accounts on which a bid is based is vital. However, the importance of the due diligence process goes far beyond this. At its heart, due diligence is about the identification and avoidance of risk in all its forms.

'Not many would argue with the fact that due diligence is necessary'

NEWS

Flights sold to Hallmark owner

Company sold as part of 're-alignment'

Free coaches to Excursions

Henlys to fold after US sales

Event hit by

Types of Due Diligence

Financial due diligence focuses on the past and present. It confirms the figures in the accounts and highlights any potential tax liabilities. It can also include a review of forecasts and the likelihood of their achievability.

Legal due diligence provides comfort on the ownership of assets and highlights potential issues arising from past transactions and contractual commitments, legal disputes and non-compliance with the law and regulations.

Commercial due diligence focuses more on the future. It highlights the risks inherent in the business model (arising from the customer base, supply chain, etc) and can also involve a review of the assumptions underlying forecasts provided, the economic environment, the market and competitors.

Environmental due diligence investigates whether the business has been meeting compliance levels stated in environmental legislation and highlights any potential liabilities arising from its activities. As European environmental legislation has tightened over the years, the potentially massive liabilities arising from environmental issues have underlined the importance of this area.

In our experience it is essential that all advisers work closely so as to:

1) Avoid duplication of work
2) Ensure that matters identified which affect other areas of due diligence are effectively communicated
3) Ensure timetables are adhered to

It is also essential that, prior to the commencement of due diligence, all information relevant to the assignment has been compiled and that the vendors (to include key management and directors) have freed up time from the running of the business to be involved in the due diligence process, thereby ensuring a cost-efficient and effective buying process.

Due Diligence and Negotiation

Increasingly, due diligence is no longer the final step taken in an acquisition but forms part of the negotiation process itself. Acquirers are using it to negotiate price and structure, saying: "If we can't eliminate that risk, the price changes to this..."

Due diligence is also complementary to the negotiation of vendor representations and warranties in the sale and purchase agreement. Risks that are limited through the due diligence process do not need to be defended against through documentation.

A due diligence severely limited in scope, however, often leads to lengthy and complicated negotiations over onerous warranties.

FACTFILE

This article has been prepared as a guide to topics of current financial interest. We strongly recommend you take professional advice before making decisions on matters discussed here. We cannot accept any responsibility for any loss to any person acting as a result of this material.

David Main

Paul Fussell

For further information, please contact David Main (*dgm@hazlewoods.co.uk*) or Paul Fussell (*paf@hazlewoods.co.uk*) on 01452 634800, website *www.hazlewoods.co.uk/Bus_Coach*

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Licensing & Legal

Failed operator banned

Former soldier hit by plethora of problems including driving offences and heart attack

Repute and finance

FAILED coach operator Gordon Kelly of Kelly's Coaches has had his operator's licence revoked after being prosecuted for a string of driving offences.

Deputy West Midlands traffic commissioner Alan Bourlet delivered his decision to Mr Kelly last Thursday following a public inquiry in Birmingham.

In delivering his verdict, Mr Bourlet said: "I find this operator is not of good repute or appropriate financial standing." But Mr Kelly, 43, from Herefordshire was told he could re-apply for his O-licence via public inquiry at a later date.

Mr Bourlet added that Mr Kelly must not start driving again until July 2005. His PCV licence would be reinstated in August.

The former soldier originally lost his PCV licence in February 2004 after being caught speeding four times between April 23, 2001, and November 29, 2003. He appeared in court again in July after being caught driving while disqualified and without insurance on June 25, 2003.

The inquiry heard how Mr Kelly had suffered a heart attack on November 20, 2003 and later endured family problems that meant he had to spend time away from running his business.

Kelly's Coaches folded in January after a contract driver failed to turn up to take children to school. The firm, which had been operating since 1997, immediately lost its contract with Herefordshire Council.

Mr Kelly, who had driven tanks and lorries in the Army, told the inquiry that he had no plans to start up another firm but would like to start afresh as a coach driver. He said he could not cope with the stress of running a business.

After the inquiry, Mr Kelly said he was relieved.

He said: "The main thing is I will be able to drive again, that's all I want to be able to do but this decision means, as far as I'm concerned, if I wanted to run a coach company in the future I can do.

"I got what I wanted; I couldn't have expected the result to be better." At Mr Kelly's side during the inquiry was his 18-year-old daughter Lauren.

Defending her father's record, she told Mr Bourlet he was a great driver. She said: "I would rather get in a car with him than anyone else - I trust him with my life." The public inquiry was set up because Mr Kelly had breached Section 17(1) and 17(2) of the Public Passenger Vehicle Act 1981.The law gives the defendant the right to go before a public inquiry.

Mr Bourlet's task was to assess whether to revoke, suspend or curtail Mr Kelly's O-licence. The hearing lasted 25 minutes and took about 15 minutes for Mr Bourlet to consider his verdict.

The inquiry also heard how Mr Kelly, after suffering a heart attack in November last year, was deemed by the DVLA to have made a full recovery.

Mr Kelly, who served in Northern Ireland, The Gulf and Bosnia before leaving the Army in 1995 after a 16-year career in the forces, had passed a series of rigorous tests before being considered for a renewal of his PCV licence in August next year. He has not been officially bankrupted and is now working towards paying off the considerable debts he incurred while operating his failed coach business.

He has enrolled on a special scheme called an Individual Voluntary Arrangement, which allows Mr Kelly to form an agreement with his creditors to pay the debts over time as an alternative to bankruptcy.

Drugs test failure TWM driver wins claim

A TRAVEL West Midlands bus driver who failed a drugs test while under suspension has lost a compensation claim for unfair dismissal.

But Kevin Richards, of Fallings Park, Wolverhampton, is to receive an award for "injury to feelings" after he was suspended from his job without explanation. Mr Richards had complained at Birmingham Employment Tribunal of racial discrimination.

The tribunal was told that Mr Richards became involved in a confrontation with a woman motorist while driving a bus. She complained to Travel West Midlands and Mr Richards was suspended pending an investigation.

Mr Richards said that, after a Saturday night out with his friends, he went to work a few days later while still under suspension and took a drugs test for his employer. It proved positive. The tribunal was told that Mr Richards was sacked for misconduct following disciplinary and appeal hearings.

Mr Ben Daniel, representing Travel West Midlands, said: "I want to make it clear that Mr Richards was under suspension when he had the drugs test and was not due to drive buses at the time."

Mr Richards said, however, he believed he was racially discriminated against because he was not told why he was being suspended following the confrontation. Mr Richards wiped tears from his eyes as he said he felt he had let down his father who had been a bus driver for 27 years.

"I get on really well with inspectors but it was strange not to be told why I was suspended," he said. "I believe I was racially discriminated against and unfairly dismissed."

Mr Richards said he had been unable to get another driving job since being sacked because he had been too honest in telling prospective employers what had happened. He is at present doing a computer course.

TWM: no explanation

Employee in racial assault

A MAN has been found guilty of racially-aggravated breach of the peace and fined £250, after an assault on a First employee.

The incident took place at around 1130hrs on Friday August 6 and involved Mohammed Yousaf, a member of First in Glasgow's Revenue Protection Team. The security representative for First challenged a companion of the offender to produce a valid ticket and was then subjected to a racial assault. Police were called to the incident on Maryhill Road and the man, 44, was arrested.

This successful conviction follows on from a case last week, where a teenager was the first in Scotland to be convicted following DNA identification. The 17-year-old youth was found guilty of racially aggravated breach of the peace and assault on a driver. Alan Pert, security manager, First in Glasgow added: "We are delighted another offender has been made to pay for his actions toward a member of our staff. All our staff are entitled to a safe working environment and we will continue to work closely with Strathclyde Police to ensure that this is the case." Mr Yousaf said: "I am pleased and hope that this incident, and subsequent conviction, stands as a warning to those who think it is acceptable to behave in a racially-abusive manner, whoever the victim."

First in Glasgow: backs staff

Other decisions

EASTERN TRAFFIC AREA

CAMBRIDGE, October 5, 2004
Cantabrica Coach Holdings Ltd, Watford, Herts
● Action: PSV S17 - Formal warning in respect of 17(3)(aa) - undertaking.

NORTH WESTERN TRAFFIC AREA

GREATER MANCHESTER, January 29, 2004
Britannia Hotels Ltd, Altrincham, Cheshire
● Action: PSV S17 - Licence revoked with effect from September 30 2004.

LEEDS, June 8, 2004
Michael Pearson, Chesterfield
● Action: PSV S17 - Formal warning issued.

WIGAN, LANCASHIRE, August 11, 2004
David Forrest T/A Liverpool Motor Services, Aintree, Liverpool
● Action: PSV S17 - Licence revoked with effect from 2359hrs October 22 2004

LEEDS, September 28, 2004
Rachel Dunne & Anthony Lord T/A Ashleys Coaches, Bolton
● Action: Application withdrawn

LEEDS, September 29, 2004
Kings Travel Ltd, Liverpool
● Action: S17 - Licence revoked with immediate effect
Schedule 3 - company found not to be of good repute
Schedule 3 - Vic Scrivener, transport manager, found not to be of good repute.

WIGAN, LANCASHIRE, October 7, 2004
GJ Travel North West Ltd, T/A GJ Travel, Eccles, Manchester
● Action: PSV S17 - Licence revoked with effect from 2359hrs on October 31 2004

SCOTTISH TRAFFIC AREA

EDINBURGH, September 28, 2004
Stewart Dickson T/A Dickson of Erskine
● Action: PSV S17 - No action, formal warning in that operator continue to fulfil undertakings.

EDINBURGH, September 28, 2004
Allander Coaches, Milngavie, Glasgow
● Action:PSV S17 - Formal warning in respect of future undertakings.

WEST MIDLAND TRAFFIC AREA

BIRMINGHAM, April 08, 2004
Parkash Ram Banga T/A Banga Travel, Wolverhampton
● Action: PSV S26 - Condition attached to the licence that no new local service may be registered for 12 months from May 1 2004.
Section 155 of the Transport Act 2000 - a penalty of £400 fine per vehicle is to be imposed. A total of £6,000 is payable.

HEREFORD, July 22, 2004
Kevin G and Gwendoline R Young T/A George Youngs Coaches, Newent, Gloucestershire
● Action: As announced, the traffic commissioner's decision is that:
1) The partnership is issued with a formal warning to ensure that vehicles are in good mechanical condition at all times
2) The following undertaking given by the partnership is to be recorded on the licence:
● All vehicles will receive a full safety inspection every six weeks and vehicles running on a higher mileage are to receive a safety inspection every four weeks
● The partnership's annual accounts to August 31 2003 are to be submitted by October 31 2004 and the accounts to August 31 2004 are to be submitted by December 31 2004.

BIRMINGHAM, September 3.
Rai Transport (Midlands) Ltd
● Action: That the licence is to be revoked with effect from 2359hrs on December 7 2004 pursuant to Section 17(1) and 17(3) (a) and (c) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981.
The deputy traffic commissioner has disqualified Mr Amardip Singh Rai from holding or obtaining an O-licence for two years with immediate effect pursuant to Section 28(1) of the Transport Act 1995.
That Mr Daljit Rai, transport manager has lost his good repute with immediate effect.

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Legal Eagle

A workplace extension

We are increasing the frequency of our popular Legal Eagle feature, with articles from a second transport consultancy. This week Chris Hallsworth, a partner in the WFQ legal practice, looks at the need for operators to have a Road Risk Management Policy in place

FACTFILE

Chris Hallsworth

Chris Hallsworth, LLB(Hons), is a partner in the WFQ legal practice, with over 30 years of experience, which includes representing clients before public inquiries and transport tribunals. He has worked for three police authorities, is a solicitor advocate (giving him the same rights of audience as a barrister) and holds supervisor status on the Serious Fraud Panel. He holds a part-time judicial appointment and is regularly described in Chambers Guide to the Legal Professional as a "leading transport lawyer." He has lectured to magistrates on transport topics and written articles for the trade press. His colleague, Nigel Grainger, is business manager at WFQ and has over 15 years of experience in the transport industry, with qualifications in accountancy, transport operations (CPC holder), dangerous goods safety adviser, occupational road risk management and forensic road collision investigation. He is a member of the Institute of Transport Administration and of the Institute of Advanced Motorists, and an associate of the Institute of Car Fleet Managers.

WFQ Legal Transport Consultants LLP are at 228 Upper Fifth Street, Regency Court, Milton Keynes, MK9 2HR, tel 01908 202151, fax 01908 202152.

IF ONLY life were simple, we dream. In the perfect world of dreams vehicles do not break down, passengers are always happy and smiling, drivers are joyful, roads are uncongested and a driver can't land you with a hefty fine or worse, a prison sentence.

However, with some forethought, planning and good execution (no not the driver) you can take the necessary steps to prevent you, your staff and the fare-paying public from coming to harm.

The Health & Safety Executive is now more than ever viewing vehicles as extensions of the workplace and is similarly extending the workplace regulations to cover the use of such vehicles. This means that all those rules you have put in place to protect your office-based staff should also be considered in relation to your drivers.

You should, therefore, have in place a 'Road Risk Management Policy', which all staff should be made aware of and read. It should contain rules about what is and, more importantly, perhaps what is not acceptable in relation to the use of vehicles. You should aim to give guidance and instruction in a clear and unambiguous manner that leaves no question or room for interpretation. You should police this policy in the same way you would police any other policies you may have.

The most basic part of a risk policy is that which covers driving licences. You should be checking the driving licences of your driving staff on a regular basis, we recommend, as a minimum, every three months. When checking licences you should establish that the licence given to you relates to the driver giving it you. You should then check that the driver is qualified to drive the vehicle you have issued him or her with, and then you should check for endorsements.

Be careful, as some unscrupulous drivers have been known to send off for a 'replacement licence' as they claim their original has been lost or damaged. They then use the replacement to show you a 'clean' licence, while using the original licence to give to the police and courts.

This situation puts you in a dangerous position. You have been presented with what, at face value, is a clean licence, if you accept this as fact and the driver has in reality been banned you could be guilty of using a vehicle without a valid driving licence. This could saddle you with three to six penalty points on your licence and a maximum fine of £1,000.

This could get worse as your insurance company could walk away from any claims and leave you facing the costs of meeting them and the possibility of being charged with using a vehicle without insurance. On a lighter note, with winter just around the corner, we should be grateful for the advances in the chemical industry providing us with improved coolant additives, as I am reminded of the keen and helpful fitter who thought adding salt to the coolant systems of the buses would help prevent them from freezing. It did - but it immobilised the whole fleet.

Open platform

More fairness, not roads

Coach and bus operators need to be part of the solution, not part of the problem, argues our mystery writer this week. So why ask for more roads when what we need is a fairer share of the existing network?

Britain's first motorway bus lane was opened in 1997 to reduce the amount of cars travelling to and from Heathrow Airport - but how many such lanes have been opened since?

NEXT time the debate on road building kicks off - usually when the Government announces the latest traffic speed figures - just watch as coach and bus operators bang on about the need for more motorways.

I can understand why operators want to complain. Nobody likes being caught in traffic jams, especially when your driver's hours are ticking away. Queues cost this industry millions every year, so why not join the lobby that wants more roads?

I'll tell you why not - because, if public transport of all kinds is to get anywhere in the next decade, it needs to be seen as the solution to congestion, and this industry is in direct competition with the alternatives. Roads may be one of the most important tools of our trade but what we need is a fairer share of them, not the same share of even more congestion.

Time and again the Conservative Government tried to solve congestion by building more roads. There was a lot of cronyism back then - the road builders being very well connected to the Conservative Party - but, though the spend reached record levels, where did we find ourselves a couple of years down the line? Stuck in wider, longer traffic jams.

It looks as if the Greens were right all along - the moment you build a road, it fills up. Making better roads encourages more people to travel further but, if they all choose to travel by car - as they seem to - operators get nothing but more problems. The only thing that seems to work is road pricing.

We might moan about road pricing but look what it's done in London - more space for buses, and more passengers. Even where PSVs are charged for the road space - like on the M6 Toll road - I'd have thought that, with each passenger paying 10p, this could be made to pay a dividend for the operator.

From where I stand, it seems to me that all the trade associations have sat on the fence with regard to road building. The Freight Transport Association never stops saying that we should build more motorway lanes but we don't hear what the Confederation of Passenger Transport thinks about road building.

I think this industry should be much noisier on this issue and demand more priority. Instead, we stay quiet.

I can still remember what was said about the outside lane ban. The Government said it was just an experiment and that, once they'd analysed the results, they'd decide whether to keep it. Well, we never saw the results of any surveys. Nobody ever claimed it had eased motorway congestion. Nobody ever made any great safety claims for it. So why have we still got the outside lane ban?

Once again, we let the Government get away with this and. if we don't speak up about the road-building debate, we'll be ridden over roughshod again. We should be asking the Government to make special effort to improve the express coach network, for instance, by making all bus lanes coach accessible, and by making more effort to get a 'hearts and minds' campaign going telling the public how they'll improve the environment and ease congestion if they make more journeys by coach.

The worst congestion occurs during Bank Holidays, when everyone tries to go on holiday by car. There's not just the cost to the environment to consider, there's the loss of life in road traffic accidents - but tourist boards aren't urging attractions and hotels to make special efforts to accommodate coaches.

Usually, coaches, coach drivers and coach passengers are treated like second-class citizens wherever they go. In London, traffic wardens pounce on coaches as they try to set their passengers down.

Coaches and buses should be treated better. It should be mandatory for all new attractions to have a coach park and for all towns to provide coach parking centrally. We should be campaigning for more coach-only lanes like the one at Heathrow.

The next time the road-building lobby starts shouting, shout back. We don't need more roads wrecking the countryside, we need fairer treatment.

Got something to say?

Then write around 800 words and send it to the editor - the address is on the Letters page

Have *your* say

Send your letters to: The Editor, *CBW*, Emap Active, Bretton Court, Bretton, Peterborough PE3 8DZ or e-mail *mark.williams@emap.com*

Trucks in bus lanes not so crazy?

George Peach
Regional Secretary
CPT Yorkshire

The FTA's view that trucks should be allowed to share bus lanes (*CBW*, October 14) might not be so daft an idea as first thought by many in the bus industry.

While I am not suggesting that all bus lanes should be shared with trucks, I am certain there are many examples where the arrangements, if properly managed, would not be disruptive to bus operators or their customers. It could also lead to many more bus priority schemes being introduced where physical road capacity restrictions would otherwise preclude them from even being considered unless the displaced general traffic could be provided for. The displaced traffic in this case could be trucks sharing bus lanes - some priority, albeit shared, is better than no priority.

LETTER OF THE WEEK WINS A CORGI CLASSICS MODEL BUS
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In my earlier career as a bus driver in the1970s with Trent in Nottingham, I remember very clearly the introduction of a 'no car lane' on Radcliffe Road, Nottingham in the Trent Bridge direction. This was a huge success and resolved the lengthy delays to buses travelling over the bridge into the city that had previously been experienced.

Regrettably the experiment did not survive as the strong car lobby won the day.

I should add these views are my own and not necessarily those of the CPT.

School buses and separate fares: no confusion

From Tony McNulty
Minister of State, Department for Transport, London SW1

I have noticed an item that appeared in the Question & Answers section of *CBW* (*CBW*, October 14) headed 'DDA school bus conundrum'.

There is no confusion on the legal requirements for new school coaches over 22 passengers from January 1 2005. If any of the children are charged a fare to travel on the coach whether such a fare is charged on the vehicle itself, or in advance on a periodic basis, then the coach has to comply with the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations SI 200 No. 1970 as amended. That means that the coach will be required to comply with the general accessibility provisions (Schedule 3) and to provide access for a wheelchair user (Schedule 1).

I suspect that the source of confusion in your article may be that some crucial words were omitted from your article claiming to quote from advice issued by the Department in 2002. If the words in bold in the following extract from your piece are added, the situation becomes both clear and consistent:

"...even where no separate fares are charged **on the vehicle, if fares are charged on a periodic basis**, school contract operations are carrying passengers at 'separate fares'."

I hope this clarifies the situation.

Wheel loss: old ideas are sometimes the best

From: David Jones
Romford, Essex

The recent unfortunate death of a woman caused by a lorry wheel coming adrift in the West Country reminded me of a conversation I had recently with one of our engineers on the same subject as related to buses.

He confirmed my impression that most of the problems occur on the nearside of the vehicle, as it was with the lorry mentioned above. I have a share in a preserved 1950s bus, the wheels of which have different direction threads according to which side they are on to stop them coming loose. Modern vehicles, with spigot-mounted wheels, have all the wheel studs threaded in the same way, regardless of which side they are on. I wonder if anyone has any statistical evidence to compare the security of 'wrong way' nearside threads with the current arrangement. It could be that the old ideas are sometimes better than the new.

Just a thought.

● *CBW* covered this subject in some depth (*CBW*, November 27, 2003) in an article about the launch of a new locking nut type product from Wheelsure. The Society of Operations Engineers publishes a pamphlet called *Wheel Loss, No Longer A Mystery*. Details on www.soe.org.uk - **Dep Ed.**

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Day's out

Having spent 28 years running coaches, Ray Day and his family have shut up shop and are off to Thailand. Martin Cole explains why

Above: The Day family's new toy - a Polynesian-built catamaran

AFTER TWENTY-EIGHT years of successful operation, Day's Coaches of Rotherham is winding up its coaching business, realising some of its assets, and the family is moving to start a new life in Thailand.

Attracted by the warm weather, beautiful sunsets and inexpensive cost of living, Ray, partner Jacqui and their two children are currently finalising the sale of their assets and plan to leave the UK early in January 2005.

Ray said: "We have discovered that it is easier to expand and run a coach operation than trying to close one. We are busier than ever selling off our last vehicles and organising the sale of all garage equipment and stock."

Ray's father and mother, Derrick and Josephine - founders of the company - have also decided to move out there to spend their retirement in a favourable economic climate where their pension will ensure them a far more luxurious lifestyle than they could hope to enjoy at home.

Derrick Day originally worked as a Drayman, delivering beer to pubs and clubs in the South Yorkshire area. In 1976, as a sideline, he bought a two-year-old Ford Transit minibus from Kirkby Kingforth and fitted in jobs alongside his regular working hours. The operation was run from the family's residence on a housing estate in Mexborough.

Demand for the vehicle grew quickly and it was joined by another 12 months later and Derrick, after trying to do two jobs for four years, was forced to review his options. He decided to give up his Drayman's job and go full time into passenger transport.

Ray worked alongside his father full-time from the age of 18 - when he got his licence - and the pair began to expand the business - which was then called Derrick Day & Son. Josephine Day looked after the books and provided a great deal of support, despite holding down a full-time job of her own. Ray said: "Mother, our Josie, was always regarded as the backbone of the business. There was nothing she wouldn't turn her hand to and, among other things, she often helped out as a courier or escort on trips. She could always get the staff organised, too - particularly chasing up drivers over their hours. Despite her diminutive four feet eleven and a half inches height, she was affectionately known as 'The Kraaken'."

The first full-sized coach to join the fleet was a used Bedford with Duple Dominant coachwork. It offered a big boost to passenger capacity and was bought alongside a pair of 24-seat minibuses.

Day's first 53-seat coach was an ex-Crosville Leyland Tiger which was bought from Stuart Johnson with a brand new Duple body. It was the first time the business had invested in a flagship and the first time it had bought on finance. Ray said: "We learned a valuable lesson from buying that coach. It hurt us on repayments for a long time and you rapidly learn that the only way to maintain flagship vehicles is if the rest of the fleet is paying for them.

"Ever since that purchase we have always bought our vehicles outright. The only exception was one of the more recent Mercedes-Benz Varios that we bought from Autobus. The only reason we took out finance on it was to offset some tax. I reasoned that it was better to buy good quality used vehicles and have everything paid for. It makes sure you keep those vehicles earning - paying for themselves and building up capital to fund expansion or replacements."

Steady growth continued and so the business purchased a new minibus to improve the image of the company - a Reeve Burgess 12-seater Mercedes-Benz 307D.

Derrick and Ray began to develop differing ideas on taking the business forward and eventually Derrick took a brave step, made Ray managing director when he was just 21 years-old and took a back seat.

Derrick concentrated his effort on Day's Tours, the Holiday side, and kept an overall view on the development. Derrick & Josie are completing the last three tours up to the end of November - somewhat ironic as they started the business and yet are still around to the very end. In-fact, Josie would not be retiring if Ray and Jacqui had decided to carry on.

Ray said: "When I took over I had reached a point where I really wanted to go for it and make the business earn some money. Father was a bit too traditional to want to work the same way. He was very 'old school' and believed everyone was as ethical and held the same values as him. But life's changed and you have to go and get it if you really want to achieve something. He took a very brave step in giving me the reins when he did - but it meant we could develop to suit the market - and I think we managed it quite well.

"Essentially, I'm a businessman who happens to run coaches - not a coach operator attempting to run a business. I hear about so many operators being owed money and often

Above left: The Day family - ready for the off

forced out of business as a result. You can't allow situations to develop like that. We demand a deposit when the vehicle is booked and, unless the balance is paid seven days before the departure date, we don't do the job. It doesn't lose us many customers behaving like that either. I think there has only been a couple who refused to play ball.

"The only exceptions to this are official government or local authority bodies - for schools and suchlike, and one or two corporate clients - but even they have to go through a payment-up-front period before we extend terms. One is a well-known fast food chain that couldn't understand why we weren't prepared to let them pay six months in arrears. I asked them if they would let me walk in and take a burger away with a promise to pay in six months and they said 'Oh we don't conduct business on that basis'.

"I really wish I'd been born 40 years sooner - and been there as the industry was approaching its heyday. I could have had a real go then and developed a major touring operation. They were getting good money for jobs and faced little in the way of competition - by today's standards.

"A lot of our work came from the Working Men's Clubs and we were right in the heart of all the mine closures and subsequent unemployment and its effect on the economy within the local community - yet we continued to expand throughout that depressed time."

To cater for planned expansion, Ray had previously located a new site from which to base the business. It was part of an old rail yard in Carlisle Street, Kilnhurst - comprising two acres of land and a house.

A large investment was made in securing five ex-Tappin Bedford YMTs - one with Plaxton Supreme III bodywork and the others with Supreme IV. Ray recalled these were all in excellent condition and vastly improved the company's public profile.

They were followed by a Leyland Cub with Wadham Stringer Vanguard coachwork for a brief foray into bus operation. The vehicle was used on the M13 local service but was disposed of after two years as it proved troublesome.

Things took a dramatic turn in the early 90s when the company began to acquire Volvos for the first time. The business became very solidly based around the Volvo B58 - which proved to be a revelation in terms of engineering quality and its 'bullet proof' reliability. The company bought 16 vehicles in two years - again sourcing some from Paul Tappin. Others were less well preserved but were sent to Wilkinsons Coachworks in Scarborough for re-panelling, new fronts and a re-spray. They were subsequently re-trimmed in Barnsley and turned out in an 'as-new' condition.

Ray was also highly complimentary about the way his chief engineer, Alan Hart, ran the workshop and maintained the vehicles. He said: "Alan did a superb job and he built up a good team around him. One area we have benefited from when running these older vehicles is in bringing along good trainee mechanics. Keeping the Bedfords and B58s running meant keeping an eye out for scrap vehicles with plenty of serviceable parts on them. This is an ideal way to introduce a trainee mechanic to the workings of the main components. We let them strip the vehicles down, remove the useful parts, strip them down, learn what makes them work, rebuild them and put them on the shelf for when we need a replacement."

Alan Hart worked for Day's throughout the years of expansion and eventually left to return to the Merchant Navy where he had spent a number of years training to qualify as a second engineer. He now runs engine rooms on massive merchant ships.

Reflecting on Alan's contribution, Ray said: "I could not have expanded the company at such a rate without his help. He was a star."

Alan was replaced by Brennon Knight, a former director of Yorkshire Terrier. Ray recalled Brennon came to rewire a rebuilt Jonckeere P90 and stayed for three years. He was also charged with rebuilding a batch of MCW Metroliners - no small job, but one which he took in his stride.

Last but not least was Karl Williams. He rapidly proved he was a first-class, totally uncompromising mechanic who could repair anything, anywhere, any time - and it would stay fixed. He was a good friend to the drivers if they didn't damage "his" coaches. However, if they did, he was merciless with jibes about their bad driving.

Accompanying the surge in expansion was a marketing spree based on group mailing. Ray explained: "New technology was coming in - in terms of communications - and we built up databases of potential clients for our services. Group faxing, mail shots and, later, e-mailing, brought a significant upturn in business. It was like turning on a tap. We did £50,000 worth of business with schools on trips to the Millennium Dome alone.

"School work began to blossom to a point where we needed high capacity and so bought a batch of seven MCW Metroliners. They were ex-Taylors of Liverpool and we bought them through Blytheswood. We had them all re-panelled to look nice because they were absolute 'sheds' but they suffered a lot of gearbox faults and so we began to look elsewhere.

"It was about this time a high-capacity single-deck coach appeared at one of the shows. I think it was one of Ron Whittle's. We knew immediately that was the way to go and so we investigated having a 70-seat conversion done on a Duple 320-bodied Javelin. It proved a real

The new house in Thailand - a refreshing outlook and a stark comparison with Kilnhurst

Day's two-acre site and home-built workshop is being retained

turning point. We were miles ahead of anyone else in the area with 70-seaters and that vehicle has paid for itself time and time again. It worked every day, day in, day out and we got £380 a day for it.

"Needless to say it was quickly followed by another Dennis Javelin as the fuel economy was outstanding - and then we bought one more Javelin from EvoBus with a Marcopolo Explorer body. It became our 'new' flagship until we decided to pack it all in."

The reasons why the family decided to quit life in Kilnhurst are many and varied but, despite the ties of established roots, family and friends, the burdensome and bureaucratic environment surrounding business, and particularly PSV operation, has tipped the scales in favour of early retirement and an easier life.

Ray said: "I've travelled a bit. I found it difficult to take holidays at normal times because of the business but a friend introduced me to scuba diving and we used to journey out to the mid-Pacific. Over the years I also went to other locations and I've always been interested in property and wondered what it would be like to live in the places I've been to.

"A few years ago we went on a family holiday to Thailand and Jacqui just happened to mention how nice it would be to live there. It made up my mind straight away and it wasn't long before we were researching the country thoroughly and looking at property. We eventually settled on a really nice place that was inexpensive by UK standards and I've bought a catamaran for us to while away our time sailing around the 70 or so islands that are just two hours away.

"Living there is very cheap and it highlights things like the 'rip-off Britain' mentality we face all the time. For instance, I've just bought a new Toyota Landcruiser for use out there. It's the top specification with air conditioning, full leather trim and a ten-CD multichanger. In the UK, without the leather or the CD changer it costs £47,000. In Thailand I've paid £16,000!

"The tax regime here is also too oppressive. I looked into it with an expert and discovered most businesses have no end game to work towards. Not only do we pay a fortune in corporation tax as well as personal tax, if you calculate it over the life of the business you'd probably come up with an overall figure of 57%. But add in what you don't get back from things like fuel - where you are paying 700% and then consider the amount of capital gains tax due when you sell up, plus the unrecoverable VAT you will be liable for when disposing of assets you'd already written off - and you end up with a figure of 87%.

"Fortunately I realised this early on and have taken steps to avoid as much as possible. It didn't stop us making some mistakes but by and large we are set to come out of it OK. I have my accounts done every nine months into the year now. It gives me three months to sort out what to invest to offset excessive payments.

"You can't just leave it until 12 months are up and wait for the accountant to tell you something needs doing. I fell foul of that one when our accountants announced I had to pay £29,000 in tax because we'd missed the deadline by two weeks. I asked him why we were being hit so hard and he told me I was a victim of my own success. I told him that he was also a victim of my success and dispensed with his services. If you don't take control yourself - what can you expect? You may view your accountant as a part of your business but they all have other irons in the fire and you can't allow yourself to think they are 100% involved in your wellbeing."

Later, Ray developed interest in building as a hobby. This led to the desire to build a new workshop and the project was duly designed and costed. Yet he was dismayed at the quotes received to construct the building - a single span design on a concrete base - wide enough to take two vehicles side by side.

He said: "We put down the base ourselves and did a pretty fair job, but we needed quotes on erecting the steel, bricking round the skirt and fixing the cladding. Quotes ranged from £63,000 to £130,000 - which seemed like an awful lot of money to me. I managed to get hold of a gang of steel erectors when they were slack and we put the lot up for £32,000. It shows you what can be done if you've mind to do it."

Ray also looked at branching out into new areas and saw opportunities in property. He bought a row of terraced housing and began a process of renovation and letting. The properties were bought at the right time and their market values have now increased significantly - making them a considerable asset.

The best idea for turning in a profit, though, turned out to be the development of a chain of 'Adult Entertainment' shops. Having bought and renovated the properties with new shop fittings, Ray turned over the running of them to Jacqui and her management team. He mused: "It's amazing the

Ex-Tappin coaches were a reliable foundation

Expensive mistake - vehicles on finance

amount of business these places do. You'd think with the sort of things on sale there would be all manner of regulations but, other than governing what can be seen through the windows, what you can display openly or who can be admitted, there is very little. Compared to running a coach operation it's like falling off a log."

Another worry for the continuation of the business has been the growing problem of obtaining drivers. Day's, like most other operators, is finding replacements are just not coming forward to fill the gap as the older ones retire. "Sadly," reflected Ray, "the level of skill and responsibility required in the job is just not consistent with the rate you can afford to pay. Kids these days are just not interested in taking on a job as a coach driver. It's the furthest thing from their minds when they leave school.

"We must thank all our drivers and families for their support over the years. We have had some fantastic staff - some of whom have become family friends. The last 28 years would not have been so successful with out them."

"We knew immediately that was the way to go and so we investigated having a 70-seat conversion done on a Duple 320-bodied Javelin"

Above: Derrick Day with his first Ford Transit

Left: Derrick and Josephine take delivery of new minibuses

Although Day's has enjoyed operating coaches despite the huge amount of organisation and background work that accompanies private hires, schools work and touring, changes in the way the industry is regulated have begun to leave a bad taste.

Ray said: "We had a very good relationship with the 'Ministry' and have always done our utmost to ensure vehicles are roadworthy and all our systems are in place. At the peak of our operations we went six years with no faults registered at annual inspections and we've never been frightened of turning up at events where we know there will be spot checks but, over the past couple of years, things have degenerated considerably.

"It seems they are only interested in achieving numbers and are deliberately looking for things to fail a vehicle on. I don't believe any operator can now live up to the letter of the law 100% of the time. You have to agree to do so if you want a licence but, in reality, if a tail light bulb blows you are operating it illegally between the point it goes out and the point you stop to change it. So 100% is not possible.

"What gets me is the sanctimonious attitude now adopted by them and the fact that they cannot be called to account for any mistakes on their part. We had a coach pulled up just outside Bristol because it had two small cracks in the windscreen. Both had been drilled and stopped and the screen had been like it for quite a while. However, an examiner beat the windscreen six or seven times with his hand and chased the crack right across the screen. His actions cost us a prohibition and a repair cost we could have avoided for some time - but no-one is called to account if you complain and the chances are they will come down on you as a result.

"They can lose all your paperwork and not be accountable for it but, if we lose one tachograph disc, we are explaining our lives away for weeks. We had one driver go five minutes over his allotted hours over a three-week spread and were hauled before the magistrate.

"It cost us a day for two people, only to find they had lost all our paperwork relating to the offence. A day was set for another hearing - which we dutifully attended and they read out a charge against us that actually related to a haulier carrying refrigerated goods - more wasted time. At the third hearing they finally produced the right papers. The magistrate agreed it seemed almost insignificant and a trivial matter in view of our record but he was bound to make something of it as the case had been brought - yet he wouldn't even consider the wasted time we had been forced to endure because of their own incompetence.

"A typical example of what really irritates me is when we arrive in a coach park - say at Skegness - and, just as the passengers leave the vehicle, the examiner is aboard, says nothing to the driver - who is dutifully filling out his paperwork - and then presents him with a prohibition for having no safety hammer. It's pretty obvious the hammer has literally just walked off the coach in the pocket of a passenger, yet although the driver tells the examiner he has a spare in the locker and will replace it in minutes, he still gets the ticket.

"They've become pedantic and overbearing in the extreme and they just create bad feeling where there should be a spirit of working together. If they concentrated their efforts on bringing those to justice who do operate illegally or below required standards we'd all have a greater respect for them.

"They pick on the good operators because they know the vehicles will be parked in proper coach parks and they are 'easy meat'. If they just spent some time looking around the local roads and villages just away from the main venues they would find all the vehicles more likely to have something wrong with them. Plenty of operators do this. We all know who they are - but does anyone make an effort? No - it's poor."

"There are plenty of things I'm going to miss with going to Thailand but the nit-picking attitude of the Ministry isn't one of them. As far as I'm concerned they know where they can stick it."

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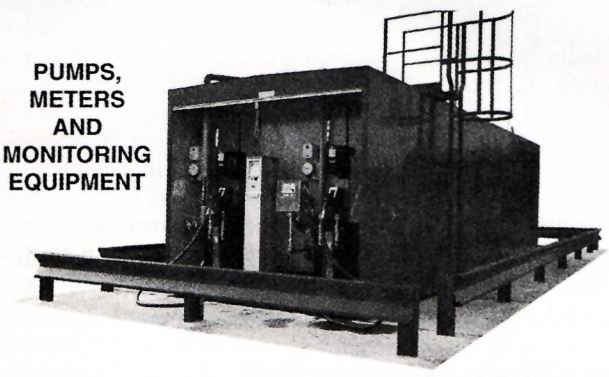

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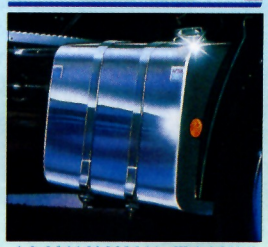

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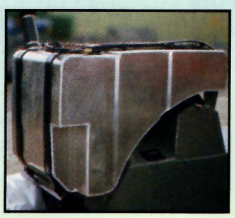

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Fleet *upgrades*

Pronto enters service with Redbridge

Plaxton

ONE of the first examples of Plaxton's new Pronto minibus entered service last week with Redbridge Transport Services, the transport operation of the London Borough of Redbridge.

Based on a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter with Sprintshift automated transmission, the Pronto has a welded stainless-steel frame which draws on Plaxton's extensive experience of producing coachbuilt small buses. Although the vehicle is able to carry up to 16-seated passengers, Redbridge Transport has opted for a layout with ten seats, all with integral three-point seatbelts, and space for two wheelchairs.

Tracking on the floor provides secure wheelchair anchorage points and allows for easy removal of seats to accommodate more people in wheelchairs.

"One of the benefits of a coachbuilt 16-seater over a van conversion is that it features a wider gangway, which makes travel easier for older people," said Amerjit Sahota, passenger services manager for Redbridge Transport. "We will be using the Pronto on a range of transport services, including school journeys and, during the day, carrying older customers to day centres."

Redbridge Transport runs some 90 vehicles, ranging from cars to double-deck buses, and the Pronto joins other Plaxton products in the fleet - from Beaver minibuses to a 57-seat B7R Profile coach.

"We have had good service from Plaxton," said Amerjit, "and are impressed with the build quality of the Pronto."

The Pronto has been designed to further raise the standard of transport provided to disabled people and has deep tinted glazing giving it a coach-like style. The main entrance has a single-piece electrically operated door, again echoing coach styling. Inside there are colour-contrasting panels on the sidewalls and ceiling, all finished in easy-clean materials.

Wide double-opening doors on the rear provide access for passengers in wheelchairs, using a lift stored under the floor at the rear. A PLS tail-lift is fitted to the Redbridge Pronto.

Plaxton provides a comprehensive three-year warranty on its new minibus, which is set to appear at the CTA Exhibition in Manchester.

TWH Travel Volvo is quite a sight

Volvo Bus

TWO Volvo B7Rs are proving a big hit in service for London firm TWH Travel on sightseeing tours.

The Sunsundegui-bodied coaches were bought in April to supply a contract running tours for overseas visitors. The coaches are powered by Euro 3 D7C engines, which the firm says have proved ideal for the work.

"We operate the vehicles in a 53-seat configuration with reclining seats and full air-conditioning," says MD Terry Hawthorne. "Most of our passengers are from the US and other parts of the world. "They demand high standards and they get it. Our contractor, Premium Tours, is delighted and that's very important for us. "The B7Rs are the only Volvos in TWH's 12-vehicle fleet but, based on initial experience with them, the firm plans to add more.

"First impressions are very important and I am convinced that the B7R Sunsundeguis are helping foreign tourists get the right impression of the UK," said Mr Hawthorne.

Freshfield sees the future

Moseley PCV

A NEW Bova Futura completes Stockport-based Freshfield Coaches' line-up by offering a 53-seat executive capacity to its fleet.

Owner George Brookfield says there has been growing demand for such a vehicle and, with the FHD 13.340XE, he's now in a position to meet it. The 13-metre body offers significantly more luggage space and is proving popular on tours since its delivery at the start of October.

The Futura makes something of a change for Freshfield, which has previously bought Volvos. "It's been something I've been looking at for some time, so it's not a hasty decision. I really think it's a superb coach. I don't think I'm taking a risk with the vehicle - the interior is excellent, I expect fuel economy to be good, and the coach should be very busy next year", said George.

The firm operates five Volvos alongside the Futura and its manual 'box should be able to deliver better fuel economy in the hands of skilled drivers. Mr Brookfield also paid tribute to Moseley's service: "Their set-up is superb: no two ways about it," and to salesman Steve White: "An excellent person to deal with."

The coach has reclining seats with footrests, centre sunken toilet, water boiler and fridge and ASR traction control.

Silver's Setra stars in line-up

EvoBus UK

SILVER Holidays of North Wales has taken delivery of a new Setra S415 to replace its first Setra on the firm's holiday business.

The new coach has 49 recliners with fold-down tables, air-con, alloy wheels, satellite navigation, DVD player and integral vacuum cleaner. It also has the usual Setra facilities including central sunken washroom and a high-quality in-coach audio system. Transmission is through an ASTronic automated gearbox.

Says owner Elfyn Thomas: "I was very pleased with the S315, so the S415 was the obvious coach to succeed it. It gives us very good fuel economy and our customers are very impressed with it.

"On a coach touring holiday it is vitally important that your customers are travelling in a comfortable and pleasant environment - and that's what the Setra provides."

Silver Star was established in Caernarfon in 1918 and was taken over first by Elfyn's father in 1941 and then by Elfyn in 1990.

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What's new

Tacho analysis time cut

COACH TOUR operator Shearings Holidays has cut its tachograph analysis time from hours to minutes with the new 'smartanalysis' service from Exentra Transport Solutions.

The analysis tool helps promote efficient management of tachograph information with a view to optimising vehicle and driver performance and utilisation in addition to meeting compliance obligations.

Exentra's smartanalysis is a fully managed service. It transforms tachograph recording and reporting into an Internet-based service - eradicating reams of paperwork and allowing operators to make greater use of tachograph information as a business development and management tool. Exentra believes the drift towards the digital era will see even greater acknowledgement of the benefits it offers.

Shearings currently carries around half a million passengers per year, utilises a fleet of 226 vehicles and some 450 drivers. It maintains an excellent safety record and, although well-versed in tachograph compliance this commitment had, until recently, brought with it particular issues that implementing smartanalysis has been able to address.

Chris Lewis, director of Exentra Transport Solutions, said: "Once information had been gathered from the paper tachograph records in each vehicle, it underwent a process of analysis which could take many hours to produce results.

"Some six to seven hours was typical but as many as 17 had also been experienced. Remarkably, the smartanalysis system has reduced these figures to little more than five minutes. This means greater control of information, not least because it provides the company with an ability to tailor information collected into the optimum form. It can now be produced at a specific time, for particular individuals and in a choice of formats."

Smartanalysis has significantly reduced the time required to create driver reports

Smartanalysis is a pay-per-use service. It allows the accumulated information to be interrogated securely and safely to meet a variety of different reporting requirements. Specific elements can be assigned to individuals at pre-defined levels of management while the system can even be set up to e-mail information automatically to selected addresses as and when required.

Paul Wharmby, senior administrator at Shearings, said: "Smartanalysis has significantly reduced the time required to create driver reports. Importantly, we no longer just receive a report for the driver to sign but can view the information used to create the report, allowing us to investigate any issues much more quickly. Managers throughout the company are now able to directly access information concerning their drivers without having to contact the analysis bureau.

● ***Details: Steve Fisher on 0870 345 0165, e-mail*** **steve.fisher@exentra.co.uk** - ***website*** **www.exentra.co.uk**

OASIS leads Chip & PIN - claim

SECURE TRANSACTIONS based on Chip & PIN technology are now being implemented by retail industries but OASIS customers have used it for nearly three years.

The first company to employ the technology was CH Jones - as an aid to the fuel management market - where a number of benefits are offered.

OASIS - open access smart intelligent system - employs an embedded microchip in a card. It has a secure memory and is capable of complex data processing. It carries the same information as found on a magnetic strip along with key information that makes counterfeit virtually impossible.

Its PIN number makes sure only authorised users can make a transaction.

Fuel service customers using the CH Jones network, which spans 1,000 outlets, have rapidly adapted to the new system and already 37% of transactions are completed via Chip & PIN. The figure covers 45% of the total fuel handled by the network.

Fuel management benefits can be accrued by using the OASIS data capture device - Databridge. This is fitted to the vehicle and holds the smartcard. It records odometer readings when the ignition is turned off.

The microchip also embodies ControlMax which enables fleet managers to define refuelling criteria - such as valid days and times, maximum single fills, daily and weekly limits, etc.

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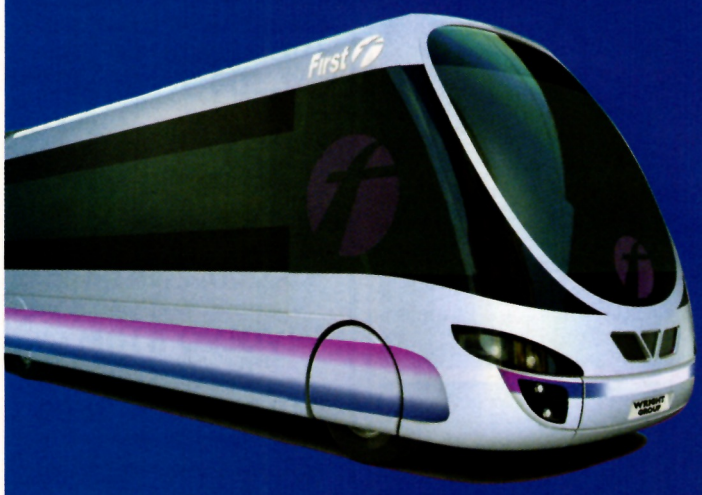

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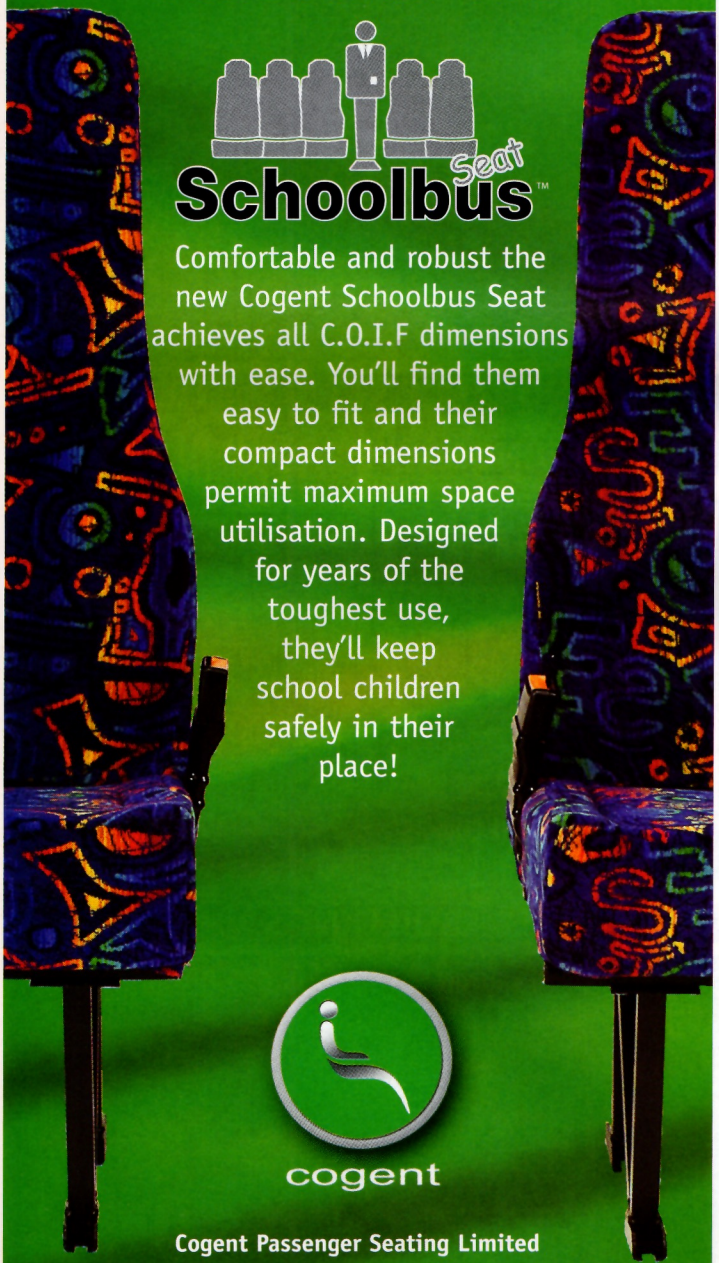

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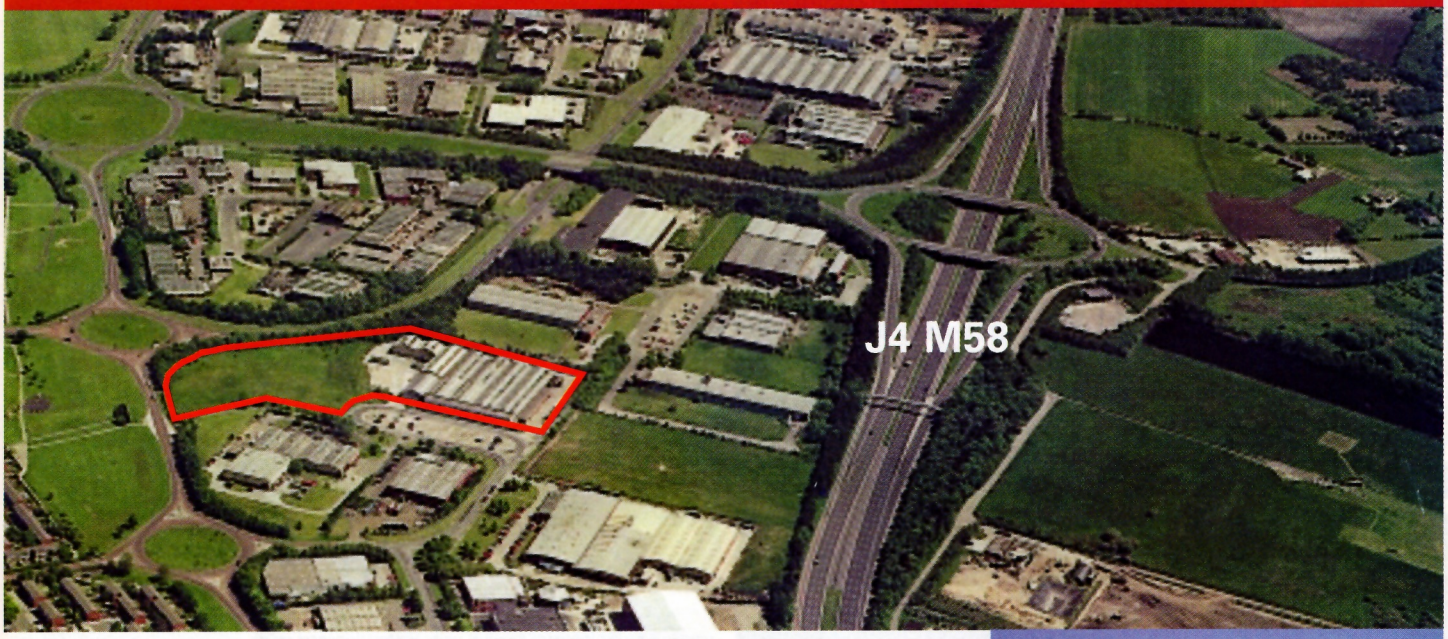

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